

## **Digital Equity for Caregivers**

### **Introduction**

Today, we live in a digital world: from how we shop, work and bank to how we socialize and connect to information and critical resources, such as healthcare – especially during a global pandemic. The internet has emerged as a necessary and basic tool of modern life, and yet over a quarter of older Rhode Islanders lack internet access. Through the digiAGE Collaborative, the Office of Healthy Aging (OHA) has brought together industry, government, and community partners to help bridge this digital divide for older adults – including caregivers – through coordinated investments in smart devices, internet services, digital literacy training, and online content creation.

According to AARP, there are 136,000 caregivers in Rhode Island, providing over 100 million unpaid hours of work at a value of \$1.8 billion.<sup>1</sup> Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand and complexity of this work has grown. Some 60 percent of caregivers are in the workforce, balancing careers and personal caregiving responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, according to Rhode Island Grandfamilies Fact Sheet, there are over 6,000 Rhode Island grandparents caring for children under the age of 18.<sup>3</sup> These responsibilities might include caring for children who are distance learning due to the pandemic – and at the same, providing support to a parent or spouse. While rewarding, caregiving leaves many overwhelmed and stressed.

The Office of Healthy Aging (OHA) offers a wealth of programs and services to support caregivers. Among them are options counseling, referral and respite services, food assistance, and financial help for home-care and adult-day health program participation for those who qualify. As part of its digiAGE initiative, OHA is also equipping caregivers – with special focus on those from lower income communities and those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic – with the technological tools and training underpinning daily life and helping to keep people connected to one another, and to opportunity, while physically distanced. . A recent online survey conducted by the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving found that of the 400 caregivers who responded to the survey 83% reported increased stress related to the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

### **Purpose Statement**

Through this funding opportunity, OHA seeks innovative proposals from community and municipal groups to promote digital equity among older adults who are caregivers in Rhode Island. According to the Pew Research Center, more than 25 percent of U.S. adults age 65+ do not use the internet. It is estimated that an equal percentage of Rhode Island's older adult population is not online, with the lowest usage among those in lower socio-economic status households. OHA seeks proposals that meaningfully expand digital access and literacy among caregivers, with a focus on communities and households with greatest need. Funded initiatives will empower caregivers to develop new skills, combat social isolation, and connect with web-based services through investment in internet services, smart devices, technical training, and user-centric content.

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<sup>1</sup> AARP Public Policy Institute, "Valuing the Invaluable: 2019 Update Charting a Path Forward." pp. 24. Nov. 2019. Web.

<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2019/11/valuing-the-invaluable-2019-update-charting-a-path-forward.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00082.001.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> AARP Public Policy Institute, "Breaking New Ground: Supporting Employed Family Caregivers with Workplace Leave Policies." pp. 3. Sep. 2018. Web.

<https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2018/08/breaking-new-ground-supporting-employed-family-caregivers-with-workplace-leave-policies.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> GrandFacts State Fact Sheets: <https://www.grandfamilies.org/Portals/0/State%20Fact%20Sheets/Grandfamilies-Fact-Sheet-Rhode-Island1019.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving: <https://www.rosalynncarter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Caregivers-in-Crisis-Report-October-2020-10-22-20.pdf>

## **Funding**

Through this funding opportunity, OHA is making available \$200,000 to be awarded December 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021 for the purposes of providing additional support services for caregivers with a special focus on using digital technology and serving communities and populations disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Non-profit organizations and municipal governments with experience in delivering caregiver support services will be eligible to apply for awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000.

Examples of programs to be funded include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Programs that offer digital access and training for caregivers who have limited experience with technology;
- Programs that support non-English language learners in connecting to and using technology;
- Virtual support circles that bring caregivers together for mutual support;
- Efforts to assist grandparents in their caregiver roles – i.e., assistance with K-12 distance learning training;
- And/or programs that offer virtual counseling services or other self-care opportunities to caregivers to support their mental health and wellness.

## **Requirements:**

As part of the submission, the applicant should describe the program to be funded in detail. Services to be provided should target older Rhode Islanders, age 60 and older, be offered free of charge, and prioritize persons/communities with greatest social and economic need. Applications should include the proposed scope of work and associated budget and budget narrative. Applicants should include the following information in the project description:

- Description of how this proposed project supports the state's broader digiAGE effort;
- Goals, objectives, and metrics of the project, including milestones, timeframes for implementing activities, and specific uses of any purchased devices and/or services;
- Description of how the project will be evaluated;
- Outline of proposed caregiver outreach and engagement relevant to this project.

In addition, the applicant must comply with all OHA and federal reporting requirements related to the project within the required time frames indicated by OHA. Proposals should clearly identify all personnel/subcontractors who will work on this project.

## **Process:**

Applicants must submit a complete application package, including budget, to Dana McCants Derisier at [dana.mccantsderisier@oha.ri.gov](mailto:dana.mccantsderisier@oha.ri.gov) by **Wednesday, December 9, 2020**. Applications will be reviewed and scored according to strength and alignment with the purpose statement above. Once an application is approved, OHA will provide the contractor with a complete contract for signature which will need to be signed and submitted along with the following documentation:

- (1) Signed Notice of Authorized Representative (for contract signatory)
- (2) Proof of Insurance
- (3) Signed FFATA (if award is over \$25,000)

**APPLICATION**  
**DIGITAL EQUITY FOR CAREGIVERS**

**Contractor Information:**

Agency Name:

Address:

Telephone Number:

**Agency Contact Information For Project:**

Name:

Direct Telephone Number:

Email:

**A. Program(s) To Be Provided:**

Please provide a brief narrative on the program(s) your agency will provide as indicated in the Section on Funding.

**B. Budget and Budget Narrative (not to exceed three (3) pages)** which explains, in reasonable detail, the budget for the proposed project; if applicable, copy of 501(c)(3) tax exempt IRS Letter, or that of the fiscal sponsor; and if applicable, documentation of the applicant's federally approved indirect cost rate.